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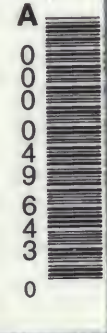
# The Spiritual Revival

by

## Achad ha-Am

*(Translated by Leon Simon)*

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# The Spiritual Revival<sup>1</sup>

(1902)

IT is not a mere accident that the question of Jewish culture has come to the front with the rise of "political" Zionism. Zionism—unqualified by any epithet—existed before, but it knew nothing of any problem of culture. It knew only its own plain and simple aim: that of placing the Hebrew nationality in new conditions, which should give it the possibility of developing all the various sides of its individuality. This being the aim of the earlier Zionists, the first article in their programme was naturally the creation of a fixed, independent centre for our nationality in our ancestral land. But at the same time they kept a watchful eye on every side of the life of the Hebrew nationality as it exists at present, and used every suitable means of strengthening it and promoting its development. A society of Zionists in Warsaw, for instance, was engaged at one and the same time in founding a colony in Palestine, a school of the modern type in Warsaw, and an association for the diffusion of Hebrew literature. That is to say, these men thought it their duty to combine "political" with "cultural" work; and all this in the name of Zionism (or Chibbath Zion, as it was then called). Nobody challenged this combination; nobody raised the question whether this "cultural" work was right or wrong, obligatory or permissible. It was understood on all sides that the conception of Zionism

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<sup>1</sup>[This essay was originally an address delivered before the general meeting of Russian Zionists at Minsk, in the summer of 1902. Only a part of it, that part which deals with the question of Jewish culture in its broader aspects, is here translated. The omitted portion is not of any considerable length.]

must include all that comes within the definition of Hebrew nationality. Any piece of work which would assist in strengthening and developing the nationality was Zionist work beyond all manner of doubt.

And now a new Zionism has arisen, and has adopted the term "political" as its descriptive epithet. What, we may inquire, is the precise point of this epithet? It adds nothing to the older Zionism, for Zionism has always been, in its hopes for the distant future, essentially "political." From its inception Zionism had at its very root the hope of attaining in Palestine, at some distant date, absolute independence in the conduct of the national life. That was a necessary condition of the unhindered and complete development of the national individuality. Now, even the newer Zionism cannot bring the Messiah "to-day or to-morrow"; hence it also is "political" only in its hopes for the future. Small wonder then that the epithet, which clearly added nothing, was often understood as taking something away. It was taken by political Zionists to mean something like this: The earlier Zionists included in Zionism everything germane to the development of the Hebrew national individuality; whereas for us it has only a political aim. Zionism for us means simply the foundation in Palestine, by means of diplomatic negotiations with Turkey and other powers, of a "safe refuge" for all oppressed and persecuted Jews, who cannot live under tolerable conditions in their native countries, and seek a means of escape from poverty and hunger. Even the Basle programme helped to fix this idea in people's minds, because in its first paragraph it defined the aim of Zionism thus: "To found in Palestine a safe refuge for the Jewish people," and made no mention of the *Jewish nationality*. The various speeches of Zionist leaders at Basle, in London, and elsewhere, which were a sort of commentary on this paragraph, stated emphatically and repeatedly that Zionism had come to solve once for all the economic and political problem of the Jews; that its aim was to gather all the oppressed of Israel into one place,

into the Jewish State, where they could live in security, and be no longer foreigners and aliens, whose struggle for existence excites the jealousy and ill-will of the native population. This is not the place to examine this form of Zionism with a view to discovering how far its promises as to the solution of the Jewish problem were capable of fulfilment in the natural course of events. I have dealt with this point on several occasions elsewhere. Here I only wish to point out that these promises had the effect of attracting attention mainly to the political aspect of Zionism, until the Zionist conception became narrowed down, and lost half its meaning.

Thus the "problem of culture" was a child of political Zionism. For centuries our people have suffered torments for the sake of the preservation of the products of their national spirit, seeing in these products the be-all and end-all of their existence. And now that they have at last come to recognise that suffering alone is not enough, but that it is necessary to work actively for the national revival—now, forsooth, it has become a "question," whether the strengthening of the national spirit and the development of the nation's spiritual products are essential parts of the work of the revival. And this question is answered by many in the negative!

But it must be added that this negative attitude, if we may trust those who adopt it, does not involve any opposition to "cultural" work as such. "Far be it from us," they say, "to deny the usefulness of such work. Though we do not regard it as Zionist work, we do not say that Zionists should not take it up. On the contrary, we actually encourage them to take part in cultural work so far as they can. But we do not wish to make it obligatory on them, because that would be mixing up Zionism with matters which are not essential to it, and have no necessary connection with its principles." Certainly it cannot be denied that many of these Zionists, who regard "culture" as something foreign to the conception of Zionism, do in fact take part in cultural work,

do in fact found schools and libraries, and in some cases even help in the diffusion of Hebrew literature and so forth. Nay, more: if you examine Zionist societies in various places, you will find that it is precisely such work that keeps them alive. Wherever a Zionist society really lives, its life is generally a result of cultural work, because such work can obtain a hold on the members, and give them the opportunity of devoted and persistent activity of a concrete nature, which has a visible usefulness. And, on the other hand, where a society is content to do no more for Zionism than sell "shekolim" and shares and hold "political" lectures, there you will generally notice a feeling of emptiness and the absence of a life-giving force; and in the end such a society pines and wastes away for lack of food, for lack, that is, of solid and constant work, which can rivet the attention, occupy the mind, and rouse the emotions and the will without intermission. All this is quite true. But to what conclusion does it drive us? Those who oppose "culture" conclude that there is no need to talk a great deal about "cultural work," or to argue and dispute about the purely theoretical question, whether such work is essentially bound up with the conception of Zionism, or not. This question, they say, is purely one of theory; in actual practice most Zionists do perform their share of this work to the best of their ability. But this conclusion is right only from the point of view of the interests of culture; it is not right from that of the interests of Zionism. It may be true that cultural work needs no express sanction from Zionism, so long as Zionism in its purely political form cannot provide its adherents with any other form of work which has greater attractions and a stronger hold. So long as that is the case, political Zionism is bound to rely on the help of cultural work, which is better able to satisfy the mind and provide an outlet for the energies of those who detest waste of time and idle talk. But if this sanction is not necessary to culture, it is most emphatically necessary to Zionism. Every true lover of Zionism must realise

the danger which it incurs through the diffusion of the idea that it has no concern with anything except diplomacy and financial transactions, and that all internal national work is a thing apart, which has no lot or portion in Zionism itself. If this idea gains general acceptance, it will end by bringing Zionism very low indeed. It will make Zionism an empty, meaningless phrase, a mere romance of diplomatic embassies, interviews with high personages, promises, *et hoc genus omne*. Such a romance appeals to the imagination; but it leaves no room for creative work, which alone can slake the thirst for activity.

When, therefore, we demand a clear and explicit statement that work for the revival of the national spirit and the development of its products is of the very essence of Zionism, and that Zionism is inconceivable without such work, we are not giving utterance to a mere empty formula, or fighting for a name. We are endeavouring to save the honour of Zionism, and to preserve it from that narrowness and decay which will be the inevitable, though undesired, result of the action of those leaders and champions of the movement who wish to confine it to the political aspect.

But before we attempt to make cultural work a part of the Zionist programme, we must distinguish between the two branches of that work. These two branches, though they differ in kind, have hitherto been confused, with the result that the question has become still further complicated.

The degree of culture to which a nation has attained may be estimated from two points of view: from that of the culture which it has produced, and from that of the state of its cultural life at any given time. In other words, "culture" has both an objective and a subjective meaning. Objectively, a nation's culture is something which has a reality of its own: it is the concrete expression of the best minds of the nation in every period of its existence. The nation expresses itself in certain definite forms, which remain for all time, and are no longer dependent on those who created

them, any more than a fallen apple is dependent on the tree from which it fell. For instance, we still have the benefit of Greek culture: we drink in the wisdom of Greek philosophers, and enjoy the poetry and the art which that great nation has left us, though the nation itself, which created all this culture, has vanished from the face of the earth. But the "state of the cultural life" of any nation is purely subjective and temporary: it means the degree to which culture is diffused among the individual members of the nation, and the extent to which its influence is visible in their private and public life. The "state of the cultural life" is thus essentially dependent on the individuals of whom it is predicated, and with them it passes and changes from one period to another.

Culture in the objective sense and culture in the subjective sense do not necessarily reach the same degree of development at the same time. There are periods in the history of a nation in which all its spiritual strength is concentrated in a few exceptionally gifted minds; and these produce an original culture of high value, which the generality of their countrymen (such is their "state of culture" at that particular time) cannot even fully understand. The England of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries affords an illustration. Shakespeare, Bacon, Locke, Hume, and the other great English writers of that period, a large body of men, relatively speaking, created new worlds in literature and philosophy, by the light of which men still walk at the present day. But the great mass of the English people was then in a low state of culture, which did not by any means correspond to the level reached by these giants. On the other hand, the intellectual forces of a nation in a particular period may find their expression in the general state of culture: education may be universal and the tone of life throughout enlightened and refined: while, at the same time, this culture may be barren, producing no master-minds able to express the spirit of the nation in original creative work, but dependent entirely on its own past, or on borrowings from other



nations. This is the condition, for instance, of the Swiss at the present day. They are all educated in excellent schools, which satisfy the highest demands of European enlightenment ; in many departments of the national life they show a high, and perhaps unequalled, level of culture. But from the point of view of *objective* culture Switzerland is unproductive : as yet there has arisen no great creative intellect, capable of embodying the Swiss spirit in an original national culture ; and even the best teachers in the Swiss universities have to be imported from abroad.

In dealing, therefore, with the question of spreading culture among the Jewish people, we must remember that there are two terms involved : on the one hand, the culture (in the objective sense) which we wish to spread ; on the other hand, the people in relation to that culture. Our task thus falls into two halves. We have in the first place to perfect the body of culture which the Jewish people has created in the past, and to stimulate its creative power to fresh expression ; and in the second place to raise the cultural level of the people in general, and to make its objective culture the subjective possession of each of its individual members. And in order to discover what we ought to do, and what we can do, in each of these two directions, we must clearly understand the position and the needs both of the culture and of the people.

I propose to deal in turn with each of the two halves into which I have divided the main question.

The existence of an original Hebrew culture needs no proof. So long as the Bible is extant, the creative power of the Jewish mind will remain undeniable. Even those who deny that the Jews are a people at the present day are compelled to admit that when they were a people they were a *creative* people, and the products of their creative power bear the indelible impress of their native genius. This being so, all those of us who believe, or rather *feel*, that the Jews are still a people, have the right to believe equally,

without looking for any special proof, that the Jewish creative genius still lives, and is capable of expressing itself anew. But a different idea has gained currency of late, and especially among Zionists: to wit, that there is no true Hebrew culture outside the Scriptures, which the Jews produced while they lived and worked in a normal manner on their own land; that all the literature of the Diaspora does not express the true Hebrew genius, and has no connection with the earlier literature, because the heavy yoke of exile crushed the creative faculty and made it sterile. Those Zionists who hold this view apparently think that it strengthens the case for Zionism, because it belittles yet another side of the life of the exile. But as a matter of fact, if this view were correct, we should be compelled to doubt whether there were any hope for a revival of our creative power, even after the return to our own land. Every vital function which ceases to work becomes weaker and weaker, until at last it atrophies; and two thousand years of disuse would be sufficient to kill the strongest function imaginable. But, fortunately, this view has no foundation. The unfavourable conditions in which we have lived since the Dispersion have naturally left their mark on our literary work; but the Jewish genius has undergone no change in its essential characteristics, and has never ceased to produce. For instance, it is the fashion amongst non-Jewish scholars (and of course most Jewish scholars adopt the fashion, as usual) to emphasize the essential and fundamental difference between the teaching of the Prophets and the practical Judaism which grew up in the time of the second Temple, and received its final form after the destruction of that Temple. The teaching of the Prophets, they say, was exclusively moral, and was directed towards a lofty spiritual ideal; whereas the later practical Judaism concerned itself only with external regulations, and wasted its strength in the creation of innumerable trivial ordinances, with no moral value whatever. The difference is, in their view, so patent that it cannot possibly be denied. And yet, if we look more closely,

we shall find that these two Judaisms, widely as they differ in content, are products of one and the same spirit, whose impress they bear in common. It is a fundamental characteristic of the Jews that they do not readily compromise, and have no love for half measures. When once they have recognised the truth of a particular conception, and made it a basis of action, they give themselves wholly to it, and strive to work out its every detail in practice ; there is no regard for side issues, no concession to existing interests. It was this characteristic that produced first of all, in the days of our freedom, the teaching of the Prophets, with its extreme insistence on morality ; it was this that produced afterwards, in the days when we were slaves, the teaching of the Talmud and the *Shulchan 'Aruch*, with its equally extreme insistence on practice. The nation was driven to emphasize the aspect of practical observance by the necessity of preserving itself in conditions of slavery and dispersion : hence the belief that " the Holy One, blessed be He, wished to bestow merit on Israel ; wherefore he multiplied for them the Law and the commandments." Once entered on the path of the multiplication of commandments, we went on multiplying and multiplying without end. We did not discriminate between the important and the trivial ; we could not give up the pettiest of petty details.

The national creative power, then, is not dead ; it has not changed, nor has it ceased to bear fruit in its own way ; only the changed conditions have given its fruit a different taste. The fruit produced by a tree in the place where it grows naturally and freely is unlike that which it bears when it is preserved by artificial means in a strange soil ; and yet the tree is the same in its essential nature, and so long as it lives it produces fruit of its own specific kind. So it is with the Hebrew spirit : it bore fruit after its own kind, and created a literature in a mould original and peculiar to itself, not only while the Jews lived in their own country, but also in the lands of their exile, so long as the conditions were such as to leave the

nation any possibility of devoting its whole spiritual energy to its own work.

It is only in the latest period, that of emancipation and assimilation, that Hebrew culture has really become sterile, and has borne practically no fresh fruit at all. This does not mean that our creative power has been suddenly destroyed, or that we are no longer capable of doing original work. It is the tendency to sink the national individuality, and merge it in that of other nations, that has produced two characteristic phenomena of this period: on the one hand, the conscious and deliberate neglect of our original spiritual qualities and the striving to be like other people in every possible way; on the other hand, the loss to ourselves of the most gifted men whom we have produced in the last few generations, and their abandonment of Jewish national work for a life devoted to the service of other nations.

Indeed, these very men, with their great gifts, are themselves a proof that we still have within us, as a people, a perennial spring of living creative power. For try as they will to conceal their Jewish characteristics, and to embody in their work the national spirit of the people whose livery they have adopted, the light of literary and artistic criticism reveals quite clearly their almost universal failure. Despite themselves, the spirit of Judaism comes to the surface in all that they attempt, and gives their work a special and distinctive character, which is not found in the work of non-Jewish labourers in the same field. It is beyond dispute, therefore, that, if all these scattered forces had been combined in working for our own national culture, as in earlier times, that culture would be to-day one of the richest and most original in the whole world. We might attempt to find satisfaction in this thought. But, unfortunately, it can only serve to increase our despondency, when we see our people exporting without importing, and scattering the sparks of its spiritual fire in all directions, to augment the wealth and the fame of its enemies and its persecutors, while for itself it has no enjoyment of its own wealth,

and its national treasury is none the richer for all the work of its most gifted sons. At the present day we are suffering heavily from that "evil" which the writer of Ecclesiastes long ago noticed as "heavy upon men,"—"a man to whom God giveth riches, wealth, and honour . . . yet God giveth him not power to eat thereof, but a stranger eateth it."

But we have already gone so far in renouncing our national individuality that we are no longer even conscious of the evil; and the dispersion of our intellectual forces scarce claims a passing sigh of regret. Nay, when we see a Jew earning fame by distinguished work in any non-Jewish world of culture, our hearts swell with pride and joy, and we hasten to proclaim from the housetops that "so-and-so is one of our people," though "so-and-so" may be doing his utmost to forget and bury the relationship. Occasionally such an incident as this may provoke some of us to lament the sorry plight of a nation which can only till the fields of other peoples, while its own lies neglected and untended; but many of our "superior" and "broad-minded" brothers treat us with a lofty contempt, and regard our complaint as treason to "humanity." "What do we care," you will hear them argue, "whether a man works for his own people or for another? Enough that his work benefits humanity at large. The good of humanity—that is the one ideal of the future; to set up any other is a sign of petty tribalism and narrow-mindedness." This is certainly a "broad" view: but it overlooks the fact that greatness is a matter not of breadth only, but of depth. In reality, this view, for all its breadth, is utterly superficial. For consider the two sides of the antithesis. In the one case a man works among his own people, in the environment which gave him birth and endowed him with his special aptitude, which encircled the first slow growth of his faculties and implanted in him the rudiments of his human consciousness, his fundamental ideas and feelings, thus determining in his childhood what should be the bent and character of his mind throughout his life. In the

other case he works among an alien people, in a world that is not his own, and in which he cannot become at home unless he artificially change his nature and the current of his mind, thereby inevitably tearing himself into two disparate halves, and foredooming all his work to reveal, in its character and its products, this want of harmony and wholeness. Is there really no difference ?

It follows, then, that humanity at large suffers to some extent from the dispersion of our cultural forces ; and therefore our staunchest champions of humanity have a perfect right to share unhesitatingly in our concern at this dispersion. But even if they think that the loss to humanity is not so great as to justify them in feeling concerned about it, we at least, we who are nationalists, need not be ashamed, I think, to publish abroad our distress at this enslavement of our capacities to alien races, and at the resulting loss to our internal national life. Even the most ardent "liberals," whose watchword is humanity, and whose lodestar is progress, even they certainly permit themselves and others to take suitable measures for attaining their own particular ends, so long as those measures do not involve any loss to humanity or progress ; and if this is permitted to individuals in their private lives, why should it be forbidden to a whole nation in its national life ? We need not, therefore, answer those who ask what humanity *loses* by our loss : it is rather for them to explain to us what humanity *gains* by our loss, and what humanity would lose if we, and not an alien people, were to derive a national advantage from the men of genius whom we produce ; if we, and not an alien people, were to lay on the altar of humanity the offerings of our own sons, who owe to us their existence and their inspiration.

Recently, for instance, we buried and mourned for Antokolsky. While the tears yet flow for the premature death of this great artist the time has not come to examine in detail, and without fear or favour, his relation on the one hand to his own people, which gave him inspiration and genius, and on the

other hand to the alien nation from which he derived riches and honour. But there is one general truth which we cannot hide. The mourning which his death has caused throughout the whole world, and especially in his native land, must cause us a secret pang, when we see that others arrogate to themselves the glory of his name now that he is dead, just as they took the fruits of his genius while he was alive : and we, meanwhile, can only reflect sadly on what Antokolsky might have given, but did not give, to his people, and on the terrible poverty and degradation of our national position, but for which men like Antokolsky would not look abroad for an outlet for their genius.

And who will dare to say that this pang which we feel is a sin against humanity and progress ? How would progress have suffered, what would humanity have lost, if Antokolsky had devoted his genius, or at least some considerable portion of it, to the service of his own people's culture ; if the matter which he endowed with form and soul had been taken from our national life, which was undoubtedly much closer to him in spirit, much more intelligible to him, than the alien life in which he sought his subjects ?

Of course, it is easy to solve the difficulty by a generalization. It is easy to say—and we do in fact hear it said very often—that Jewish life is very circumscribed, and does not afford sufficient material for a creative work of genius ; that therefore great artists are compelled to rely on non-Jewish life as a medium for the expression of their ideas. But this solution vanishes like smoke as soon as we pass from the generalization to the individual instances. Thus, to take one example, Antokolsky wished to produce a statue of a violent and cruel tyrant, steeped in bloodshed, universally dreaded, and yet not wholly dead to the voice of conscience, but alternating always between crime and repentance. Could there be a more perfect type of such a tyrant than Herod, as history portrays his character and his actions ? And if Antokolsky nevertheless chose as his model not Herod, but the

Russian king, Ivan the Terrible, was it really because there was a richer and fuller interest, a more broadly human appeal, in the figure of this obscure tyrant, almost unknown outside his own country, and scarcely intelligible to any but his own countrymen, than in that of Herod, which was bound up by a thousand links with the general culture of his era, which exercised a certain influence on the history of the world, and which was certainly familiar to the artist himself before ever he heard even the name of Ivan the Terrible? And here is yet another instance. When Antokolsky wished to create a type of a lonely recluse, writing his books in the isolation of his own chamber, he went back to the eleventh century, to a monastery in Kieff, to find the well-known Russian monkish chronicler Nestor; whereas he had seen in his own birthplace, Wilna, a recluse type of a much broader human appeal, and much closer to himself in spirit--the type, I mean, of the "perpetual student" whom a Hebrew poet has so brilliantly depicted,<sup>1</sup> the recluse who does not shut himself out of the world in a monastery, but lives in society, and is yet as far as any monk from the bustle and turmoil of life, knowing no world but that of the books which he reads, or, if he is a great man, the books which he writes. When Antokolsky was a small boy he must certainly have listened with reverence to the stories told by the old men of his town about the great recluse who lived there a hundred years before, whose whole life was one long day of study and writing, without pause or rest. But Antokolsky, the great artist, did not remember the Gaon of Wilna, who fired the boy's imagination: he wandered far afield to a medieval Russian monastery, outside the ken of himself and his ancestors, in order to find there what he could have found among his own people, and in his own town.

Was this really so necessary, so essential to the

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<sup>1</sup> [Ch. N. Bialik, the greatest poet produced by the modern Hebrew revival, has drawn in his "Ha-Mathmid" a masterly picture of the "perpetual student," who allows himself scarcely five hours' rest in the twenty-four from the study of the Talmud.]



welfare of art and the good of humanity, that we have no right to lament our loss, and to lament it aloud?

Yet there were some among us who thought it their duty to hide this national grief under the veil of love for humanity; and some of these even allowed themselves, according to reports in the press, to bear false witness against their people over the coffin, actually *congratulating* the house of Israel on the fact that Antokolsky's genius and his creations had passed into other ownership!<sup>1</sup> And the endeavour to show the world how far we are always prepared to shrink and double ourselves up in order to make room for others has gone to such lengths that Jewish writers have not stopped short of disclaiming, with gratuitous generosity, the characteristics of their own people, and ascribing them to others, in order that they might be able to point out that Antokolsky was a Russian to the very core. "The characteristics of Antokolsky's work," so writes a Jew in a Jewish paper, "are essentially characteristic of Russian art in general: idealism in conception and realism in execution. . . .

You cannot find among Antokolsky's productions even one dedicated exclusively to beauty of form, say of the human body. He always looks for the soul abiding in that body."<sup>2</sup> So these characteristics, which have notoriously distinguished the spirit of Israel from time immemorial, came to Antokolsky not from his own people, but, if you please, because he acquired "the essential characteristics of Russian art"!

But Antokolsky is not the only Jew who has consecrated the force of his genius to the service of an alien people. All our greatest artists, thinkers, and writers do the like. They leave our humble cottage as soon as they feel that their exceptional abilities will open the doors of splendid palaces. And when they achieve greatness and renown, we gaze at their elevation from afar, and share in the pride and the joy which they feel at having had the good fortune to escape

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<sup>1</sup> See the *Voschod*, July 11, 1902 (no. 28).

<sup>2</sup> The *Jewish Chronicle*, July 25, 1902.

from our darkness into the foreign light. But even this pitiable pride of ours is regarded by our enemies as the height of impudence : as though a slave should dare to remind you that he also has a share and a stake in his master's property. They grow rich by our poverty, prosperous by our decay ; and then they cry out on this despicable nation, which has not a single corner of its own in the temple of modern culture ! Such, it seems, has ever been our fate. Several nations have even annexed our God, and now scornfully ask us, " Where is *your* God ? "

But there is another side to the picture. Our best and most original minds—those whose Hebrew originality reveals itself, in their own despite, even when they work in alien fields—stand, as we have seen, outside our own body politic. What then remains inside ? For the most part, only the smaller minds and those of poorer grain ; and these are carried away, root and branch, by the current of the alien culture in the midst of which they live. Thus all their work in the sphere of Jewish culture is in the main nothing but an imitation of the foreigner, an imitation without any quality of originality, restraint, insight, or proportion.

There is one department of learning that belongs wholly to us, both in name and in substance—I mean the so-called " Jewish Science." <sup>1</sup> Here certainly was an outlet for our intellectual energies, an opportunity for us to reveal our latent originality. But what happens in practice ? The most eager and most original workers in this field are non-Jewish scholars ; and these are slavishly followed and imitated by the Jewish scholars, who never turn a hair's breadth from the general principles and lines of research laid down by their masters, even where they are by no means above criticism. Until quite recently there was no

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<sup>1</sup>[ " Jewish Science " is a mistranslation of the German term *Jüdische Wissenschaft*, which has unfortunately obtained currency. The term denotes the application of modern, so-called " scientific " methods of investigation and research to Jewish history and the problems of Judaism.]

sign of any attempt on the part of Jewish scholars to controvert even this axiom of Christian investigators, that the historical evidence of Greek and Roman literature is always to be accepted as against that of the Talmud and the Midrashim, where the two are in conflict. It is only this year that a Jewish scholar<sup>1</sup> has examined this general principle in connection with a particular question, and has found that it has no foundation, but that, on the contrary, the Talmudical references are more in accordance with historical truth. The logical method of the Talmud, again, has not yet been thoroughly investigated by Jewish scholars; and the idea which the outside world has formed of the Talmudic style of argument, that it is opposed to true logic and sound sense, has become current among us also to such an extent that the phrase "Talmudic sophism" has become with us a nickname for every crooked and far-fetched piece of quibbling. But last year a Jewish scholar<sup>2</sup> showed that the Talmudic method rests on sound foundations, and will repay study; and that, in fact, the difference between that method and Greek logic is not accidental, and does not convict the Jewish Rabbis of ignorance, but has its roots in a deep-seated and fundamental difference of spirit between the Jews and the Greeks.

But such instances of independent investigation, real *free*-thinking we may call it, are very rare in the history of "Jewish Science," and have only begun to appear recently; and it may be that they are one of the results of the modern revival of the spirit of nationalism among the Jews. However that may be, "Jewish Science" as a whole is still a bondsman to the alien; the genuine Hebrew spirit has not found full and original expression in this movement, as we might legitimately have hoped.

But in truth such a hope was *not* legitimate, not if we remember in what manner the birth and growth of the "Jewish Science" movement came about, and

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<sup>1</sup> [Dr. Büchler, then in Vienna, now principal of Jews' College, London.]

<sup>2</sup> [Dr. Schwarz, of Vienna.]

to what end they were directed. When Jewish scholars turned their eyes to the past, they were not impelled to do so by something within them that demanded that the national spirit should continue to develop in the future; they were not looking for a spiritual thread to bind together all the successive phases of our national life; they were not seeking to strengthen this thread by the aid of a clear historic consciousness. "Jewish Science" owes its being not to any nationalist impulse of this kind, but to other impulses of a temporary and accidental character, which were calculated for the most part to sever the national bond not merely as between past and present, but even as between the scattered groups into which the nation is divided to-day. Zunz, who led the founders of the movement, regarded it as a means of converting the world to more friendly feelings towards the Jews, and of obtaining the supreme ideal of those days—equality of rights. Geiger threw himself heart and soul into "Jewish Science," in order to find support for *his* great ideal—religious reform—which was itself essentially a means to the acquisition of equal rights. Even Zechariah Frankel, who was closer than they were to the Hebrew spirit, did not hesitate to publish in the "sixties," at the beginning of one of the numbers of the *Monatsschrift* which he founded for "Jewish Science," the opinion that the national life of the Jews of Prussia had ended with the removal of the last of their civil disabilities in that country, and that thenceforth it was their duty to give themselves whole-heartedly to the life of the nation in which they lived. Since, therefore, he went on, the Jews have no longer a separate history, historical investigation of their past will in future have no connection with their life in the present and the future, but will be a purely theoretical science.<sup>1</sup> Such ideas, of course, could not restore to the Jewish spirit its independence and its capacity for original expression;

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<sup>1</sup> The number of the *Monatsschrift* is not before me as I write, and I give the substance of Frankel's remarks from memory.

and so "Jewish Science" became nothing more than a memorial tablet to our dead spiritual activity.

And we find another memorial tablet in that branch of literary work in which the national spirit of every people finds its chief expression,—I mean, in our *national* literature.

Our "national literature" is often taken in a wide sense, to include everything that has been or is written by men of Jewish race in any language. If we accept that definition, we cannot complain of the poverty of this literature. Heine's love-poems, Börne's crusade against the political reaction in Germany, Brandes' critical essays on all the literatures in the world except the Hebrew—all these are ours, are parts of our national literature. But this conception is fundamentally wrong. The national literature of any nation is only that which is written in its own national language. When an individual member of that nation writes in a foreign language, what he writes may, indeed, reveal traces of his own national spirit, even if his subject has no connection with his nation (and this is, in fact, the case with the great Jewish writers whom I have mentioned, and others whom I have not mentioned); it may even influence the history of his nation, if it deals with questions affecting their life. But *national* literature it is not: it belongs wholly to the general body of literature of that nation in whose language it is written. North America has many able writers; a flood of new books, some of them of great merit, pours forth there every year, to say nothing of innumerable periodicals: and in spite of this the Americans have as yet no real national literature, because they have no separate national language, and there is no clearly defined and recognised border line between American literature and its stronger and richer sister, English literature, which annexes all that is written in the English language. So with the Swiss: their literary productions go to swell the literature of the three great nations in whose languages they write, and they themselves have no national literature of their own, if we exclude what little has

been written in the prevailing dialect of German Switzerland.

Our national literature, then, is that alone which is written in our national language ; it does not include what Jews write in other languages. If they write on subjects which concern other nations as well, or other nations only, their books belong to the literature of the nation in whose language they are written ; and the best of them find a place in the history of that literature, though not always a place commensurate with their value, side by side with the native writers. If they write exclusively on matters concerning the Jewish people and its national life, they are building themselves a Ghetto in a foreign literature : and this Ghetto, like any other, is regarded by the native population as of no account, and by the Hebrew community as a merely temporary product, which is not destined to endure as part of its national life, which it may and does enjoy at that time and in that place, but which cannot call forth, as a national literature does, a living and imperishable sentiment. Thus, for example, our community has already almost forgotten the name of Levanda : his sketches of Jewish life in Russia, which twenty years ago were still among the most popular in Russian Jewish circles, have now very few readers indeed. But Smolenskin's stories, very similar to those of Levanda in subject, and much inferior to them in ability and taste, are still as widely read and as popular as though they had been written yesterday. The only reason that I can find for this difference is that Smolenskin wrote his stories in Hebrew, and Levanda in Russian. This example, which is not unique, proves that the Jewish nation recognises as its national literature only what is written in its own language. For this reason it retains its affection for Smolenskin's stories, which enriched its national literature, even now when they belong to a bygone age ; while writers like Levanda, who use a foreign language, are popular only so long as their books are fresh, and are then forgotten, being indeed but a temporary phenomenon, which had its uses for

a certain time, but did not permanently increase the national wealth.<sup>1</sup>

But I touch here on a fresh question, which has come to the front only in our own time: I mean the question of the "Jargon." Our ancestors in every generation, though they always spoke the languages of the countries to which they were exiled, recognised beyond all shadow of doubt that we had but one national language—Hebrew. Even the Jewish-German Jargon, which has been spoken by Jews in Northern Europe for so many centuries, never had for them any greater importance than the other languages of the Diaspora, and they used it, like other languages, only under compulsion, for the sake of those who were ignorant of Hebrew.

But now there is among us a party which would raise this Jargon to the dignity of a national language. Since, they argue, the majority of the Jews have in course of time acquired a new language, which is peculiar to them, and is not shared by any other people, we must accept facts as they are, and acknowledge, whether we will or not, that this is our national language to-day, and not Hebrew, which has not been spoken for two thousand years, and in the present generation is known to very few even as a literary medium. This theory as to the national language leads logically to a new view of the national literature. If the Jargon is our national language, then, of course, the Jargon literature is our national literature; and as such it claims our affection and respect, and demands that we should give our best energies to the task of perfecting it and making it worthy of its honoured name. We must no longer waste time on Hebrew literature, which is a mere survival, galvanized for the time being into an artificial life.

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<sup>1</sup> Even Abraham Geiger, far removed as he was, by the trend of his ideas, from recognising the value of Hebrew at the present day *as the national language*, was forced to confess that Hebrew works of scholarship or general literature are much more highly valued by the people, and retain its affection and respect much longer than books on the Jews and Judaism written in other languages (A. Geiger, *Nachgelassene Schriften*, ii., pp. 286-288).

This is not the place to enter into a detailed discussion of this question. But it seems to me, speaking generally, that it is just the upholders of the view which I have mentioned, with their appeal to facts as they are, who really turn a blind eye to the actual facts, and wish to create an artificial state of things on an unstable foundation.

In the first place, the actual facts of history are against them. Never since the world began has it happened that a nation has accepted as its national language an alien tongue acquired in a strange land, after a long history during which it knew nothing of this tongue, but had another national language, always recognised as such, in which it produced a literature of wide range and glorious achievement, expressing every side of its national individuality. There is not a single nation, alive or dead, of which we can say that it existed before its national language—that whole periods of its recorded history passed away before its national language was known to it. No man can regard as his own natural speech any language which he has learned after arriving at manhood. His language is that in which his cradle-songs were sung, that which took root in his being before he knew himself, and grew up in him together with his self-consciousness. Similarly, a nation has no national language except that which was its own when it stood on the threshold of its history, before its national self-consciousness was fully developed—that language which has accompanied it through every period of its career, and is inextricably bound up with all its memories.

In the second place, the actual facts of the present are against them. This Jargon, though it is to-day the language of most Jews, is gradually being forgotten all over the world, and will have disappeared some generations hence. In America, where the Jargon and its literature are most flourishing (save the mark!), it is in reality only the language of the older generation, which brought it from Europe. The younger generation, born in America and educated in American



schools, speaks English and does not understand the Jargon. If not for the yearly inrush of Jargon-speaking immigrants, there would not be a vestige of the language left in the New World. But the volume of immigration into America is bound in the nature of things to decrease in course of time ; and with it the Jargon-speaking population will also decrease, until the Jargon is extinct. Even in its native countries—Russia, Galicia, and Roumania—the Jargon is being driven to the wall by the language of the country just in so far as education is spreading among the Jews. Thus, even at the present day, there are in those countries thousands of families from which the Jargon is banished. There is therefore no doubt that before long Yiddish will cease to be a living and spoken language. The process of its decay is an inevitable outcome of the conditions of life ; and all the efforts of its supporters to raise it in the popular estimation by the agency of an attractive literature will not avail to stem this process, any more than Hebrew literature, which certainly has always stood high in the popular estimation, availed to preserve Hebrew as a spoken language when the conditions of life demanded its abandonment in favour of other forms of speech. Their labours in the service of Yiddish can have only this result : that after two or three generations we shall have *two* dead literary languages, instead of one, as at present, and that our descendants will consequently be morally bound, in the name of nationalism, to learn both of them from books.

But I am confident that we shall not be brought into this absurd position. The Jargon, like all the other languages which the Jews have employed at different times, never has been and never will be regarded by the nation as anything but an external and temporary medium of intercourse ; nor can its literature live any longer than the language itself. So soon as the Jargon ceases to be spoken, it will be forgotten, and its literature with it ; and then nobody will claim for it, on the ground of national

sentiment, what our best men have always claimed for Hebrew—that it should be an obligatory subject of study.

In cases of aphasia it often happens, so doctors tell us, that the patient forgets all the languages that he has ever learned from books, including even the one that he was in the habit of using before his malady began, but remembers his native language—his mother tongue—and can use it with ease, even though he may not have spoken it since his childhood. Such is the strength of the natural, organic link between a human being and his own language. There is the same link between a nation and its real national language. True, an evil fate has bereft us of our national language, and forced us to use others in its stead; but no other language has ever ousted it, or can ever oust it, from its place in the roots of our being. All of them, the Jargon not excluded, obtain a foothold as the result of temporary circumstances, and lapse into oblivion again when circumstances change, and we have no further need of them. But Hebrew has been our language ever since we came into existence; and Hebrew alone is linked to us inseparably and eternally as part of our being. We are therefore justified in concluding that Hebrew has been, is, and will always be, our national language; that our national literature, throughout all time, is the literature written in Hebrew. We are at liberty to use any other language that is generally understood among our people for the diffusion of ideas and knowledge; and such use undeniably serves a practical purpose for the time being. But it is a very long step from this temporary usefulness to the dignity of an undying national literature: so long a step that it is matter for wonder how sane men can confuse two such different ideas. Indeed, if I am not mistaken, the best of the Jargon writers are themselves conscious that the Jargon and its literature are doomed to oblivion, and that only Hebrew literature can survive among the Jews forever; and it is for this reason that they have their works translated into Hebrew, in order to gain

them admittance into our national literature, and to secure their survival.

I have dealt perhaps at undue length with this question, which is not an essential part of my subject. My excuse must be that I could not pass over the confusion of thought that has latterly prevailed among us on the question of our national literature. But now to return to our subject.

We have decided that Hebrew literature alone is our true national literature. But how poor, how meagre has this literature become of late years!

Some time ago I had occasion to discuss the present position of our literature ;<sup>1</sup> and for that reason I do not propose now to enlarge on this subject, which in any case calls for no long exposition. Any qualified judge must admit that our literature has reached a high level of perfection in one branch only—that of self-advertisement. If you took our literature at its own present valuation, you might suppose that it was achieving wonders and growing richer and richer every day. But the sober truth is that this self-advertisement is the sum total of its wealth: it is a case of *vox et præterea nihil*.

Before the Haskalah period<sup>2</sup> we had indeed an original national literature. This literature is open to adverse criticism from various points of view: it may be censured alike for its content and for its form, though most of its critics have exaggerated its defects; but at least it cannot be denied that this literature is *ours*, that it was a product of the Jewish spirit, that it was a faithful expression of the contemporary inner life of the nation, and that all our best intellects contributed to its making in each successive age. But in recent times, from the day when we left the Ghetto, and began to scatter our energies to the four winds of

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<sup>1</sup> In the essay entitled "After Ten Years."

<sup>2</sup>[The Hebrew word Haskalah, translated "enlightenment" for want of a more adequate equivalent, is used to denote modern European culture, as distinguished from the purely Hebraic studies to which the Jewish mind was confined during some centuries of Ghetto life. It includes not only the pursuit of "general" (*i. e.* non-Jewish) subjects of knowledge, but also the application of modern methods of research to Hebrew literature and Jewish history.]

heaven, our literature has been smitten by the same curse that has fallen on every branch of our national culture. The really original intellects desert their own poverty-stricken people, and give their efforts to the enrichment of those who are already rich; while our literature remains a barren field for dullards and mediocrities to trample on, with that excessive unrestraint which a man may use in his own bedroom. Even what is good in our literature—the work of the few writers who deserve the name—is good only in that it resembles more or less the good products of other literatures. From the beginning of modern Hebrew literature to the present day we have produced scarce one really original book to which we could point as an individual expression of our national spirit. It is almost all translation or imitation, and for the most part badly done at that: the translation being too far from the original, and the imitation too near. And the translation and the imitation have this in common, that they are foreign in spirit. We cannot feel that our national life is linked with a literature like this, which is in its essence nothing but a purveyor of foreign goods, presenting the ideas and feelings of foreign writers in a vastly inferior form.

With shame we must confess it: if we wish to find even the shadow of an original literature in the modern period, we have to turn to the literature of Chassidism, which, with all its follies, has here and there a profound idea, stamped with the hall-mark of Hebrew originality. The Haskalah literature has not nearly so much to show.

Such, then, is the condition of our national culture in all its branches.

The whole world is reverberating just now with the cry of our wandering poor for bread. Help is offered from every side, in large measure or in small. In time they will find a resting-place, though it be only temporary, one here, one there, and the Jewish people will not be wiped off the face of the earth. But meanwhile the rot is spreading internally, and no cry is raised. Our national spirit is perishing, and

not a word is said ; our national heritage is coming to an end before our very eyes, and we are silent.

Deep indeed must be our degradation, if we have no understanding, no feeling left for anything but the physical suffering which touches our flesh and bone.

There are indeed a few individuals among the Zionists who recognise and acknowledge that the spiritual trouble of which I have spoken hitherto is fraught with danger to our people's future no less than the physical trouble ; and that a " home of refuge " for the national *spirit* is therefore not less imperatively necessary than a home of refuge for our homeless wanderers. But they imagine that there is one method of solving both problems ; that the very attempt to create a healthy and well-ordered settlement in Palestine involves the creation of that national basis which is necessary for the revival of the national spirit in that country—that basis without which we cannot hope to give firmness and stability to the national spiritual centre of our aspirations. It is, indeed, impossible to maintain that the material settlement has no bearing on our spiritual problem, or that this problem can be solved without the aid of such a settlement. On the contrary, the whole point of the material settlement consists, to my mind, in this—and it makes no difference whether those who are engaged in the work of settlement realise it or not—that it can be the foundation of that national spiritual centre which is destined to be created in our ancestral country in response to a real and insistent national demand. The material problem, on the other hand, will not disappear even after the creation of a home of refuge, because in the ordinary course of things immigration into the Jewish settlement cannot counter-balance the natural increase of the Jews in those countries where the majority of them live at present. I have endeavoured to make this clear in other essays, which probably are familiar to most of my readers ;<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> [The reference is to a number of Essays in which the author criticised the Herzlian conception of Zionism. One of them is *Pinsker and Political Zionism*, the first of the present series.]

and it is not necessary to enlarge on the subject here. But it does not at all follow from this admission that we must pay no attention for the present to the spiritual revival, but must sit and wait with folded arms until it comes of itself, until, that is, the material settlement is sufficiently established and completed. It is impossible, in my opinion, to deny that only a very large settlement could be sufficient for that purpose. Not twenty agricultural colonies, not even a hundred, though they be never so well ordered, can automatically effect our spiritual salvation, in the sense of a reunion of our scattered forces and their concentration in the service of the national culture. That result may be achieved when we have an extensive and complete national centre, embracing every department of human life, and producing in each department new demands and new means to their fulfilment. But can we sit and wait for the realisation of this great dream—a realisation which, by universal admission, cannot be speedy—and meanwhile allow our spiritual strength to waste away before our very eyes?

It is for this reason that I maintain that work for the national revival cannot be confined to the material settlement alone. We must take hold of both ends of the stick. On the one side, we must work for the creation of an extensive and well-ordered settlement in our ancestral land; but on the other side we are not at liberty to neglect the effort to create there, at the same time, a fixed and independent centre for our national culture, for learning, art, and literature. Little by little, willing hands must be brought into our country, to repair its ruins and restore its pristine glories; but at the same time we must have hearts and minds, endowed with knowledge and sympathy and ability, to repair our spiritual ruins, and restore to our nation its glorious name and its rightful place in the comity of human culture. And so the foundation of a single great school of learning or art in Palestine, the establishment of a single university for the study of language and literature, would be, to my mind, a national work of the highest importance,

and would do more to bring us near to our goal than a hundred agricultural colonies. For such colonies are, as I have said, nothing more than bricks for the building of the future: in themselves they cannot yet be regarded as a central force capable of moulding anew the life of the whole people. But a great educational institution in Palestine, which should attract Jews of learning and ability in large numbers to carry on their work on Jewish national lines in a true Jewish spirit, without constraint or undue influence from without, might even now rejuvenate the whole people and breathe new life into Judaism and Jewish literature.

I know full well that such is not the usual course of things. In every nation which develops in a healthy and natural way, the development starts from below and proceeds upwards. First of all, the economic and political foundations of the national life are consolidated; and it is only after creating such external conditions as are favourable to its survival that the nation turns to less material things, and produces what it is capable of producing in the domain of culture. That is the course of development of a young nation, new to the stage of history, which mounts the ladder of progress rung by rung. But with the Jews it is different. They climbed the lower rungs of the ladder thousands of years ago, and then, after they had attained to a high stage of culture, their natural progress was forcibly arrested: the ground was cut away from under their feet, and they were left hanging in mid-air, burdened with a heavy pack of valuable spiritual goods, but robbed of any basis for a healthy existence and a free development. Generations came and went—and still this wretched nation was left hanging in mid-air, exerting all its remaining strength to preserve its inheritance of culture, and to save itself from falling below the level which it had reached in its more prosperous days. And now, when its life is illumined by a spark of hope, when it dreams of a return to the solid earth, of a national life based on secure and natural foundations—can we now bid this

nation throw away its spiritual burden, so as to be able the more easily to concentrate on the material work which should come first in the natural order of things, and then afterwards begin again from the bottom of the ladder, in the customary way ?

“ There is nothing in the universal that is not in the particulars.” There is no nation so rich as ours in men who combine a highly developed intellect with an elementary ignorance of the alphabet of culture, and are forced to make up this deficiency after they have reached maturity and acquired a large stock of knowledge. Solomon Maimon, for example, went to school, and learned German and other subjects together with children, when he had arrived at middle age, and was known in Germany as a profound philosopher. Now what would he have said, and others like him (and there have been many Jews of this type in the past few generations), if some fatuous person had advised them to forget all that they had learned before, and to devote their whole mind to the elementary subjects, until they should attain once more, slowly and laboriously, to the rank of educated men, progressing from the simple to the difficult, as other mortals do ? The Jews as a nation are in an analogous position, child and grown man in one. The Jewish nation emerged from childhood a hundred generations back, and now demands the food of grown men ; but the conditions under which it lives compel it to go to kindergarten again, and to master the alphabet of national life. What then is it to do ? “ It is good that thou shouldst take hold of this ; yea, also from that withdraw not thy hand ” : build from below and from above at the same time ! Of course, nation building in this style is something abnormal. But then our life altogether is abnormal ; and build how we will, the building must be something quite without precedent. In this matter, therefore, we must not look for guidance to the history of other nations : we must do what our peculiar position forces us to do, relying on our nation’s strength of will and power of endurance, which have preserved it miraculously



to the present day, and will be its saviour in the future.

But we must recognise at the outset that this programme of a *spiritual* "back to the land," if one may so call it, of the re-centralization of our spiritual potentialities, is not one which can be carried out easily, and as it were by the way. To lay the foundations of a spiritual "refuge" for our national culture demands perhaps preparations no less elaborate, and resources no less extensive, than to lay the foundations of a material refuge for persecuted Jews. And besides the work of preparation for the future, there is also a great deal of work to be done in the present. We are all familiar with the division in the Zionist camp on the question of the immediate programme. For my own part, I am of opinion that work for the improvement of the material and political position of the Jews in the Diaspora, though it is undoubtedly necessary and useful as a temporary measure of relief, however slight, and though it has, therefore, undeniable claims on all who have the opportunity of taking part in such work, is yet not properly to be included in the work essential to Zionism. Life in exile, at its best, will always remain life in exile; that is to say, it will always remain the opposite of that free national life which is the aim of the Zionist movement: and one movement cannot concern itself with two opposites. But it is different in the case of cultural work. Our national creative power, as I have said above, remains the same in all ages; and it has not ceased even in exile to work in its own specific fashion. Hence, every atom of that power which is severed from its original source, and floats away into a strange world, is an irreparable loss to the nation. To gather these atoms together, and keep them in our own world for the benefit of our own national culture, is essentially Zionist work, because it adds to our spiritual wealth in the present, and also prepares the way for the greater cultural work that is to come after the establishment of the centre in Palestine. That centre once established, Palestine will make use of the products of

these forces, and will enable their activity to be carried on in a more complete and perfect manner.

This is a long and arduous task, and certainly demands a powerful and well-knit organisation, the business of which will be to gather the necessary resources without delay, and to keep constant watch over these erring atoms of spiritual force, so that they may neither waste away unheard of, nor be attracted outside the confines of Judaism. The organisation will have to support every achievement or creation of promise in any branch of culture, always with an eye to a gradual approach towards its real goal—the establishment of the spiritual centre in Palestine. Now the Zionist organisation of to-day, with all its faults, is as yet the only Jewish institution brought into being for the sake of the national revival. But it cannot possibly be saddled also with the task of reviving the national culture. In the first place, it has enough to do in propagating the idea, in educating people up to its aims, and strengthening its own institutions: indeed, these objects, which lie nearest to its intention and aim, are already beyond its strength. Secondly, no single organisation can pursue two objects which, however closely connected, are different in character, and demand different means and different men. The man who is able to collect funds and sell shares is not necessarily able to recognise a budding literary talent, and to further its development. The man with a gift for diplomacy and political organisation may not be the ideal leader for a spiritual movement, or the man best able to organise educational and literary effort. Thirdly, there is not as yet complete unanimity among nationalist Jews as regards either the means or the end of the national movement. We have, on the one side, the “political” Zionists, who regard the spiritual aspect as subsidiary and not worth the trouble; we have, at the other extreme, the “spiritual” Zionists, who are dissatisfied with all “political” work, at least in its present form, and think it useless. We have, further, “nationalists” of different kinds, who do not believe in Zionism at all,

but have a regard for the national culture, and think that the concentration of effort on its promotion is a great national object, which deserves the widest support. This being so, if we wish not to waste any of our strength, which is little enough as it is, but to use it all in the service of the general culture, finding for each individual his proper work, we must establish a special organisation for cultural work. That organisation will attract to itself all those who appreciate the value of the national culture, and make its extension and free development their aim, whether they are Zionists in the official sense, or not. All its machinery and its activities must be directed solely to its own end; it must neither subserve the political organisation nor be dependent on its opinion. It is of course obvious that the two organisations, aiming, as they do after all aim, at the same end—that of the revival of Israel—and differing only in that they approach the goal from different sides, must be closely interconnected, and be in constant need of each other. But if only they both understand the ultimate object which they have in common, their relation will not be one of jealousy and competition, but one of peace and harmony and constant mutual assistance. There will perhaps be more unity than there is at present within the Zionist organisation between the different elements which are mixed up together, and are pulling Zionism this way and that.

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This brings us to the second branch of cultural work. This side of the question is in reality much simpler than the other aspect, and needs no long exposition.

Does the Jewish people as a whole stand in need of improvement from the point of view of culture?

Some months ago a Jewish writer in a Russian periodical tried to prove that the Jews ought not to complain, because they are on a higher level of culture than the nations among which they live. The Jews, he points out, can read and write, and are endowed

with exceptional intellectual and psychological qualities, which enable them everywhere to adapt themselves to the surrounding conditions much more readily than other nations. Why, then, should they grumble? The whole cry has been raised by a few atrabilious scribblers on the lookout for a grievance; it is they who are responsible for the invention of the "Jewish tragedy."

This kind of reasoning is characteristic of slaves, whose highest ideal is to be entirely like their masters. The master is the criterion by which they measure themselves and their own worth. If they find that they come up to the standard and have no need to be ashamed before their master, they think themselves lucky, and do not dare to ask for anything more. But the free man measures himself and his standing by his own measure, not by other people's. His ideal is not to attain to the level of the men around him, but to rise as high as his own powers enable him to rise. If circumstances hinder his development, and do not allow him to put forth his powers to their full extent and realise all the possibilities of his individuality, he suffers untold agonies, and it is no comfort to him that even as things are he is superior to many other men. Take a young Jew in some benighted village, who is spending himself in the search after knowledge, and eating out his heart because he cannot burst the trammels and find free scope for his self-development, and ask him why he is discontented—point out to him that even as things are he has attained to a higher level of culture than many men in the big cities, and that he ought to be satisfied with that. He will tell you that the man must be utterly cramped in mind and devoid of sensibility who does not feel the enormous tragedy of the soul conscious of manifold powers that seek an outlet and find none.

If we estimate the cultural position of the Jewish people by this criterion, we shall have to admit that it is very unsatisfactory, and much worse than that of other nations. Every other nation is free to climb as high on the ladder of culture as its strength allows.

If it stops at an early stage, that only proves, unfortunately for this particular nation, that it is not fit to mount higher. But we Jews are hemmed in by obstacles of all kinds. We are compelled to fight at every turn, with what strength we have left, for things which every other nation obtains without a struggle. When we see that, in spite of all, we are not inferior to other nations, and need not be ashamed of ourselves, this should not console us ; on the contrary, it ought to be galling to us to see how much further we might rise, if we too could use our powers without hindrance, and if each of us could develop in the way best suited to him, as other men do. None but a slave could fail to feel or could deny the national tragedy involved in the inability to rise to the level of culture for which we are fitted by our inherent powers.

Beyond doubt, therefore, there is an urgent need for the improvement of our position from the point of view of culture. But this is not *in itself* a task for Zionism ; it only becomes so because of its national aspect. Zionism need not and cannot be a sort of " Association for the Diffusion of Enlightenment,"<sup>1</sup> because enlightenment as such has no necessary connection with the Zionist ideal, and many people are engaged in " diffusing " it without the assistance of Zionism. Modern life of its own accord forces Jews to pursue enlightenment ; and even the best minds of the " upper ten " of Jewry have been accustomed these three generations to work strenuously for the enlightenment of the people, seeking in this way to satisfy that national instinct which occasionally impels them to demonstrate in some tangible fashion that there is a link between them and their nation. Hence Zionism has no need to undertake this task ; it would be simply carrying coals to Newcastle. But, on the other side, Zionism is bound to supply this work of enlightenment with the *nationalist* basis which it lacks at present. We are

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<sup>1</sup> [As to " Enlightenment " see note on p. 25.]

all familiar with the inwardness of that enlightenment which our philanthropic benefactors are endeavouring to spread among the Jews. We know that its growth is in inverse proportion to the development of the national spirit, which dwindles ever more and more as this enlightenment spreads. Hence the improvement of our cultural position, which should be, as with other nations, an elixir of life for the people, inspiring it with new strength and vigour in its struggle for existence, has become a poison, bringing in its train nothing but death and disintegration. For this reason Zionism, which aims at the revival of the national spirit, cannot exclude popular enlightenment from the sphere of its proper work, and allow its opponents to use this force for their own ends. To exercise a wise guidance over the movement for the diffusion of enlightenment ; to secure that it shall be conducted in the national spirit, and shall be productive of good to the nation ; to wage incessant warfare against the alien spirit which is artificially introduced into our midst along with enlightenment, though the two have no essential connection—this is one of the most important branches of Zionist work. Zionism, we must all agree, has need not only of subscriptions and shares, but even more of souls. One Jewish soul saved from the snare of assimilation is worth never so many shares.

At one of the earlier Congresses the battle-cry went forth, "Win over the synagogue organisation." Zionists everywhere responded obediently, and spent much time and effort in an unequal struggle with the communal leaders. But so far their labour has scarcely anywhere had any tangible results. Indeed, it would have been better, in my opinion, if the watchword had been, "Win over the educational organisation." In the synagogue we have to deal with the parents, in the schools with the children. To conquer the parents, to infuse a new spirit into grown men who have already settled down into a certain way of life, whose opinions and feelings have already become, as it were, stereotyped, would be a matter of more

labour than profit ; the small results would not generally be worth the expenditure of energy. Surely, it were better for our purpose to lay out this energy on the conquest of the children. In them we have a clean sheet on which we may write what we will. If in course of time we can put into the field a large squadron of younger men to fight their elders, the products of the school against the leaders of the synagogue, where will the victory lie ? History bears witness that in a war of parents and children it is always the children who win in the end ; the future is theirs.

But the duty of Zionists in the sphere of education is not confined to schools of the "enlightened" type. We must remember that, side by side with the "improved" education of to-day, we have also the old traditional system, which is no doubt losing ground every year, but is still strong, is struggling hard for its existence, and will undoubtedly play an important part in our national life for many years to come, influencing by its method and its spirit the education and upbuilding of tens of thousands of Jewish children. This being so, we are bound to pay attention to this system of education also, and reform it too, in a manner suited to our purpose. We must not, indeed, set out with the idea that the traditional system is opposed, like the "improved" system as at present used, to our national spirit. It is well known that the atmosphere of the Cheder is Jewish through and through. The picture of "the community of Israel," with its sorrows and its hopes, is placed in the foreground of the children's daily life in the Cheder, and works itself ineradicably into the texture of their minds. There is not a book in the Cheder but reminds its young readers of their people and its history in happiness and in exile. Even the Song of Songs, the only love-song left to our people from the days of its youth, is metamorphosed into a national hymn, wherein the community of Israel pours out her heart before her "Beloved," weeps and smiles, entreats and yearns ; and the Song inspires in the hearts of

the tender Cheder children a love for their nation that passes all bounds. Yet it is obvious and undeniable, however extraordinary, that most orthodox Jews who have been trained in this system, for all their devotion to the *community* of Israel, are unable to understand the ideal of the regeneration of Israel as a *people*. The masses stand aloof, and regard the new movement with complete indifference; and their leaders are mostly opposed to it, and try, by every means that jealousy and hatred can suggest, to put obstacles in its path.

This is not the place for a lengthy explanation of the causes of this inconsistency. But I think it right to mention here an expression used by a well-known Rabbi in the course of the discussion on culture at the last Congress. "In my opinion," he said, with an allusion to his orthodox friends, "a Jew who is no Zionist is still a Jew; but he is not a logical Jew."<sup>1</sup> No doubt the Rabbi meant that the Jew who is concerned for his national possessions, and has been accustomed from the earliest years of childhood to mourn his people's ruin and dream of its restoration, must, if he were logical, be thrilled at the trumpet-call of the revival, and be one of the first to put hand and heart to the work. If he fails to do so, it is simply a mistake, due to lack of logic. This explanation cannot, indeed, be considered satisfactory to-day, when philosophers have taught us that there is no such thing as a "mistake," and that men's loves and hates are not dictated by logic. But for our present purpose we need not go deeply into the question. Even if we agree with the Rabbi that nothing but a lack of logic is responsible, we must still admit that, since these lack-logics are the majority of the products of the Cheder, this fact cannot be a mere accident, but there must be some fault inherent in the educational system of the Cheder, which perverts its pupils' sense of logic, and makes them unable to understand or feel the connection between the "community of Israel" of

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<sup>1</sup> Report of the Sixth Congress, p. 394.



the Song of Songs, yearning after her "Beloved" in Heaven and waiting for Him to bring her redemption, and the actual people of Israel, yearning after its beloved land and striving to redeem that land by its own strength.

If this is so, whose business is it to reform this educational system, in order to straighten out the crookedness of its logic, if not that of the *orthodox Zionists*, who are themselves emancipated from this logical inconsistency, and at the same time recognise and acknowledge that it is rampant in their own camp?

I say "the *orthodox Zionists*" advisedly: for we have no need and no right to demand of any section that it shall entrust the education of its children to another section which is fundamentally opposed to its views on human life. Just as the "modernists" cannot sacrifice the education that they want in order to satisfy the orthodox, so the orthodox cannot give way a single inch in a matter so vital to the existence of the ancient stronghold for which they would give their lives. It is a natural desire, and therefore a natural and inviolable right, of every man to educate his children so that they will grow up to be of his own way of thinking. And since the two main sections of the Jewish people are united under the banner of Zionism, they must both recognise the points of union and of difference between them in every department of life, and especially in that of education. They must both obey the demands of the wider idea that unites them. Every inevitable outcome of that idea is common to both, and imposes on both an equally binding obligation. But outside the limits thus laid down they are once more separate sections, and each has the right to act as it thinks best, with absolute freedom, in all its affairs. If we take this criterion, we shall conclude that Zionism must demand from both sections—and both must obey implicitly and without reserve—that each shall make the ideal of the national revival, in the modern sense, the basis of education; but on this foundation each is at liberty to erect its own

superstructure in its own way, without hindrance or interference from outside.

This solution of the problem is so natural and so simple, that one cannot help being surprised at the angry struggle which goes on incessantly within the camp on the question of education.

. . . . .

With this I think that I have fulfilled the promise made at the beginning of this paper : to clear up the "problem of culture" in the plain meaning of the term, without introducing startling new ideas or oversubtle refinements. It may be that many of my readers hoped for more practical suggestions as to the organisation of the work of culture in its two aspects ; for Zionists nowadays attach so much importance to questions of organisation. But to my mind that is not the essential thing. The idea itself, if it is clearly understood and accepted with thorough conviction, will be the best organiser ; it will always produce the necessary machinery in a form suited to its object. Wherever you find men worrying too much about their organisation and continually patching it up, you may be sure that the underlying idea is not sufficiently understood.

Perhaps these words of mine will help to clear up the conceptions involved in the phrase "cultural work," and create a true appreciation of the nature and object of that work. If so, the practical results will follow.



*Ch*



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